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INFERENCEAL REASONING  
AND THE NEEDS OF BASIC WRITERS

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition

---

by  
Paula Ferri-Milligan  
December 1993

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AND THE NEEDS OF BASIC WRITERS

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by

Paula Ferri-Milligan

December 1993

Approved by:

  
Elinore H. Partridge, Ph.D.,  
Chair, English

12/9/93  
Date

  
E. Philip Page, Ph.D., English

  
Susan M. Finsen, Ph.D., Philosophy

## ABSTRACT

Basic writers need to become conscious of the fact that they are already using abstract thought to make inferences, and they need to enlist that ability when composing if they are to develop a sophisticated understanding of the writing process. These writers, however, are often so stymied by the syntactical and grammatical complexities of writing that they are unable to move their attention beyond those levels to identify, and utilize, the more abstract areas of critical thought as composing tools.

This thesis coordinates the special needs of basic writers with the abstract concept of inference. In so doing, it looks at both current basic writing textbooks and actual student texts in order to identify the connection between inference and writing and the relative benefit to the basic writer of developing inference skills for use in the composing process. I found, through an analysis of student texts, that basic writers who learn to develop and utilize inferential skills in the writing and reading processes are successful at their writing tasks. These students learn to interweave processes of thinking, writing and reading into an inclusive, analytic and systematic experience. Ultimately, basic writers must be encouraged to develop their inferential skills within a classroom that is challenging and that rejects remediation as the only step toward advancement.

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## Chapter 1: The Role of Inferential Reasoning in the Basic Writing Classroom

Basic writers need to formulate a cohesive set of inferential reasoning skills which will, in turn, help them to develop a sophisticated understanding of the writing process. Inferential reasoning is an important organizing principle for the experienced writer--a principle which facilitates the writer's ability to move back and forth between abstract and concrete ideas and to distinguish between correct and incorrect avenues of thought. Basic writers, writers who have "...not yet learn[ed] to command...the language of a written, academic discourse" (Bartholomae 303-04), may be so intimidated by the syntactical and grammatical complexities of writing that they find it difficult to move their attention beyond those levels and to identify and utilize the more abstract areas of critical thought as composing tools. Basic writers need to become conscious of the fact that they are already using abstract thought to make inferences, and they need to enlist that reasoning ability in their composing process.

In Errors & Expectations, Mina Shaughnessy explores the reasoning patterns of basic writers. She suggests that the "...conventions that govern academic discourse...[range] widely but in fairly predictable patterns between concrete and abstract statements, between cases and generalizations..." (240). And she identifies the basic writer's

inability to "...[develop] greater play between [those] abstract and concrete statements"--suggesting that it is the "absence of movement" between the two which results in difficulty for the basic writer (240):

The difficulties BW students have with making deliberate shifts away from or toward the points of highest abstraction are of course at the root of their difficulties with organization as well...this task of controlling the direction of an essay while at the same time giving play to the ideas that are generated along the way is probably the most taxing part of writing. (244)

Shaughnessy acknowledges the basic writer's ability to engage in abstract thought. But, at the same time, she recognizes that writer's inability to control the direction of that thought. In addition, Shaughnessy identifies other characteristics which are typical of a basic writer's texts and which draw the basic writer's attention away from inferential thought: 1) thoughts are limited to the sentence level and do not extend beyond that level; 2) elaboration does not exist and is substituted with "conversation strategies"; 3) points shift as the basic writer gets "sidetracked"; and 4) writing is begun before ideas have "undergone...[a] period of incubation" (227-34).

The logistical process of inference requires the participant to move beyond the stage of "reporting... information" and into the inferential stage of "...[describing] what is not currently known" (Chaffee 336) --a process that requires basic writers to make those

abstract "shifts" which they may not be prepared to make. This process culminates in "judging" or "Expressing an evaluation based on certain criteria" (Chaffee 336)--which is, again, a tremendous leap for the writer who has difficulty "giving play" to ideas. In order for basic writers to identify and command inference as a composing tool, they must first develop their maturity as active thinkers.

Edith Neimark outlines the characteristics of the mature thinker in her article, "A Model of the Mature Thinker." According to Neimark, mature thinkers are: 1) transformative--able to move from the concrete to the symbolic and the abstract; 2) systematic--able to uncover an "organizing framework"; 3) detached--able to explore and appreciate other viewpoints; 4) evaluative--able to judge their own argument against a criterion; and 5) able to "[put] it all together" by becoming active proponents of the thought process (49-56). Cederblom expands upon Neimark's definition by adding that mature thinkers identify themselves:

...as a belief-forming process, rather than as a particular set of beliefs...an attitude closely connected with willingness to reason and is reflected in the best and most productive dialogues. (152)

Mature thinkers actively center their thought around a dynamic process. These thinkers are constantly engaging in



thought shifts from the concrete to the abstract and from the logical to the illogical--weighing the validity of each shift. Thought becomes the vehicle for comingling and incorporating ideas rather than merely as a storage facility for those ideas. The mature thinker is ultimately characterized as one who is willing to explore and reflect upon ideas--not looking for prescribed patterns but searching out the inherent patterns which exist within each unique thought.

Mature thinkers, therefore, have their minds engaged in the processes of reasoning and knowing. Moreover, they sequester language as a tool for use in those processes. In "Is Teaching Still Possible? Writing, Meaning, and Higher Order Reasoning," Ann Berthoff suggests that language is used, not merely as the medium for transporting ideas, but as a creating and transforming element in the thought process:

By naming the world, we hold images in mind; we remember; we can return to our experience and reflect on it. In reflecting, we can change, we can transform, we can envisage...The hypostatic power of language to fix and stabilize frees us from the prison of the moment...In its discursive aspect language runs along and brings thought with it...Discourse grows from inner dialogue...Seeing language in this perspective encourages the recognition that meaning comes first; that it is complex from the start; that its articulation is contingent on the mind's activity in a human world. (751-52)

Language is dynamic, and it allows meaning to develop. It

encourages the thinker to explore and reflect upon dramatic, recursive shifts of ideas, and language ultimately allows the mature thinker to identify and label experiences, make connections to other experiences, and transform the experiences into new ideas and concepts.

The novice thinker, in contrast, does not sequester the dynamic characteristics of language and thought. Richard Paul claims that the "...human mind is ordinarily at peace with itself as it internalizes and creates biases, prejudices, falsehoods, half-truths, and distortions" ("North" 211). Novices are comfortable with their biased view of the reasoning process. In fact, the novice may be "inflexible" when it comes to evaluating that process (Missimer 76). In such cases, this thinker has a greater tendency than the mature thinker to either: 1) ignore generalizations by concentrating upon specifics and by refusing to assimilate and incorporate any specifics into generalizations; or 2) generalize indiscriminately and ignore specifics which dispute the generalizations (Missimer 76-77). These tendencies may be partially due to the novices' lack of:

...extended opportunities to...reflect on the intellectual activities in which they're engaged...This lack of experience will significantly limit them, of course, because the kinds of strategies they must command are not straightforward, mechanical routines but heuristic, generative, and flexible - they resist easy procedure." (Kiniry and Rose v-vi)

Novice thinkers have not had the opportunity, or been encouraged, to move beyond a rudimentary understanding of the thought process. Consequently, their thought strategies are inconsistent and insufficiently developed. Since efficient thought strategies are fundamental to a sophisticated understanding and execution of the writing process, the development of inference skills must be addressed at all writing levels--writers must sequester thought and language in an active, deliberate capacity.

Basic writers must be exposed to all of the available composing tools; therefore, the basic writing classroom must provide an arena for students to test and develop their skills at mature thought. However, this classroom comes equipped with a set of unique problems and with students who have special needs. Because the definition of 'basic skills' has often excluded the process of thinking from writing (Rose 110), the basic writer has been confined to a passive learning role. Misconceptions about basic writers, both by instructors and by the writers themselves, need to be identified and confronted before effective pedagogies of writing and thinking can be developed and initiated. In "Remedial Writing Courses: A Critique and a Proposal," Mike Rose rejects the fragmented, reductionist curriculum that is characteristic of many basic writing courses (109). Rose attributes the ineffectiveness of these courses to their

self-containment, non-motivational writing topics, emphasis on 'error', and the separation of the reading and thinking processes from the writing process (109).

Rose contends that "...remedial courses do not fit conceptually and practically into the larger writing environment in which students find themselves" (110). The basic writer is imprisoned within a course that "...does not lead outward toward the intellectual community that contains it" (Rose 110). The end result of remediation is a writing course that rejects the assumption that the educated person is equipped with strategies, principles, concepts and insights which allow that person to infer in other situations (Paul, "North" 201).

Basic writers are even further limited by the choice of topics with which they are confronted. In many instances, personal topics are chosen for basic writers in an attempt to reduce their 'errors' and provide them with an ambiance of success (Rose 113). The result is two-fold. First, personal topics may be uncomfortable for some students to write on and therefore may inhibit the students' motivation (Rose 113). Second, assigning 'simple' tasks in order to help the student reduce errors does not guarantee that those errors will be consistently reduced for other, more complex, writing assignments (Rose 113). The basic writer is not provided with the experiences of the more advanced writing

students, and the basic writing classroom becomes an arena for simplicity--letting that simplicity become the vehicle for improvement. Basic writers are not given the opportunity to experience the assignments or to practice the thinking and writing strategies which will eventually aid them in other college courses.

Rose also claims that there is a tendency to separate and isolate reading and thinking from the writing process in the basic writing course (109). This results from the erroneous idea that 'basic skills' requires a reduction in discourse complexity (Rose 118). Unfortunately, this miscalculation in the basic writing classroom fosters a pedagogy which does not facilitate a holistic learning experience. Without the exposure to interpretive skills, basic writers are confined within a course that does not provide them with the thinking and writing strategies needed to succeed in other academic disciplines; therefore, the analytic community in which the basic writer is a member remains foreign. However, linking reading to writing and thinking in the basic writing classroom: 1) allows the basic writing course to become a vehicle for establishing interpretive strategies and skills which are used and required in other courses; 2) provides students with writing topics that are linked to interesting and motivational readings; and 3) reduces the emphasis on 'error' by

stressing the unity and holistic elements of the writing process.

Lunsford also stresses the importance of maintaining the academic integrity of the basic writing classroom by discouraging the remedial instructor from lowering the students' reading materials in an attempt to improve comprehension (51). Lunsford warns that this:

...may actually deter students from plunging beyond their current capacities and making mistakes, thereby internalizing new knowledge and sharpening thinking skills. (51)

Lowering the remedial students' level of difficulty provides no challenge to the students and does not afford them the chance to experiment with new knowledge. Lunsford suggests that:

...all language skills are related - that level of reading comprehension is related to complexity of sentence formation...and that both are related to mature, synthetic thought-processes. (51)

Furthermore, this researcher finds that as the students' "...[abilities] to manipulate syntactic structures [improve], so...[do] their...[abilities] to draw inferences and make logical connections" (51). Lunsford suggests the following exercises as a means of enhancing the "syntactic growth" of the basic writer: 1) "elicit student generation of sentences as well as combination of them"; and 2) "foster skills in inference-drawing, abstracting, synthesizing, and conceptualizing" (51). Wiener adds to this discussion by

suggesting that students:

...need help in visualizing and in experiencing the stages of creation from the moment a task for writing is defined until the moment the writer submits finished pages for someone to read. This concept of stages is essential for the novice...  
(88)

The process that the novice goes through must be all-inclusive and recursive, allowing for the rehearsal and the restructuring of thought. Ultimately, pedagogies must be developed and fostered which promote active engagement in the thought processes.

Researchers and educators must, therefore, focus upon developing pedagogies for the basic writing classroom which encourage an interpretative and holistic approach to composing. Axelrod and Cooper make a conscious pedagogical decision to enlist critical reading strategies as tools in the composing process. In Reading Critically, Writing Well: A Reader and Guide, the authors suggest six strategies for students to improve their reading process, thereby giving them the practice they need to develop inferential reasoning skills and providing them with a tool to improve their composing process. When faced with a text, students are instructed to read critically by: 1) previewing; 2) annotating; 3) outlining; 4) summarizing; 5) looking for "patterns of meaning"; and 6) analyzing the "reasoning and persuasiveness of a text" (2). The authors suggest that the student should:

...read critically...purposefully, with expectations arising from the context and awareness of the kind of writing...[they] are reading...read sympathetically, with an appreciation for what the writer is trying to say...read analytically, examining the different parts of the text to see how they are related...read systematically, looking for contradictions in logic and shifts in meaning...read imaginatively, filling in gaps, extending and applying ideas...become the writer's partner, completing the circuit of communication. (xxiv)

Axelrod and Cooper define critical readers as those who:

...do not just read for information, although they do work to notice important details. They do not simply accept the texts' authority, but question its assertions and information...[they recognize texts as] dialogues between active authors and active readers. (xxiv)

The active reader must "...view...[critical] strategies as choices that put them at the center of their own learning..." (Gross, Kiniry, and Rose iii). By reading critically, students are better able to understand and appreciate "...the strategies that are available to them as they learn and as they communicate what they know to others" (Gross, Kiniry, and Rose iii). Inference skills become activated through the readings, and these critical readers are then able to understand and synthesize thinking strategies relating to their own writings.

Schriner and Willen are also very aware of the special student needs, and they have reacted to those specific needs in the basic writing classroom. They have developed a program at Northern Arizona University which attempts to help basic writers "...feel confident and fully prepared to



deal with the demands that college places on them as readers, writers, and students..." (235-36). These educators adapt Bartholomae and Petrosky's approach to teaching basic writing which is outlined in "Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course." Schriner and Willen modify "Facts" in order to increase the success factor of the student population who are from broad ethnic and cultural backgrounds (230-31). "Facts" is modified because: 1) it focuses too much on individual experiences; 2) it does not emphasize social and cultural forces; and 3) the Northern Arizona University course is coordinated with two other courses that are based in social-constructionist theories (232-33). The authors propose assignments which ask:

...students to assume a more critical posture toward the socially constructed nature of their experiences, while at the same time recognizing how they as individuals interact with social forces in controlling these experiences. (233)

Schriner and Willen give students the opportunity to view the thought process.

The researchers look even further into the future to develop "...new assignments that might help students make the ties between the knowledge gained through their education and their subsequent experiences" (236). These researchers have an inherent concern for students to develop as active learners. Curriculum is developed specifically

for basic writers and addresses their concerns--students are exposed to an holistic learning environment which encourages interpretative approaches to learning. Schriner and Willen treat writers in totality and not as 'blank slates', thereby attempting to increase the writers' success in academia.

Robert Zeller is also a student advocate who encourages the development of inferential reasoning skills in the basic writing classroom, and Zeller tailors his curriculum development to the special needs of the basic writer (343). He reiterates Rose's assertion that reading, writing and thinking have become separate entities in the basic writing classroom (343). Zeller provides instructors with a practical model for incorporating inferential skills into their classrooms as the vehicle for promoting an active, unified approach to the basic writing classroom.

Zeller's assignment stems from Lunsford's 1983 CCCC conference paper, "The Three R's: Reading, Writing, and Inferential Reasoning." Zeller begins the assignment by having his students divide into small groups and discuss a series of photographs, listing details (343). The students make natural inferences while examining those details (344). Zeller notes those inferences and leads the students into a discussion of how the ability to infer transcends into other academic experiences (344). Zeller then asks the students

to write a paragraph describing a photograph of E.B. White, making inferences and supporting those inferences with specific details (344). Zeller's goal is to:

...try to get students comfortable with...the mental processes involved in writing...first they observe and draw conclusions; then in their writing they support selected conclusions with selected details from their observation. (344)

Zeller then enlists an essay by White and an encyclopedia article about White to help students write an essay about that author (345).

Zeller's intentions are to draw the focus of the basic writer to the process that they have gone through in making inferences (345). Zeller further states:

...basic writers...are already good at drawing inferences; they just do not realize that they are doing it. What these students need are assignments that build on their ability and give them practice in analyzing and synthesizing...where students develop the sort of thinking skills that will make their stay in college more meaningful. (346)

Zeller employs analysis and synthesis, as Rose states, to "...operate within the unfamiliar web of reasoning/reading/writing conventions that are fundamental to academic inquiry" (Zeller 346). This practical example details one way to present inferential reasoning skills to the basic writer. In addition, the assignment exposes students to the connected processes of writing and inferential thought. Zeller's identification of the basic writer's need to develop inferential reasoning manifests itself in an

assignment that gradually increases in complexity, with one stage building upon another.

In a paper presented at a CCCC conference, Christine Farris also reacts to the needs of the basic writer. Here, she outlines a course designed to increase the effectiveness of the basic writer's thought process. In "Using Literature to Encourage Academic Thinking in a Basic Writing Course," Farris suggests:

...that the best way to reintegrate language skills and cultivate an academic world view, to broaden, deepen and sharpen students' critical thinking, is to assign reading and encourage students to form opinions, discuss, question and examine what they read, orally and in writing, as members of their own subset of the academic community. (6)

Farris' team chose readings that:

...[allowed] students to relate new information acquired from peer discussion and eventual library research to that personal information which they already had. (8)

The researchers elicited emotional responses from the students both to the texts and their own experiences by requiring the students to keep a:

...Reader's and Writer's Journal in which their freewrite entries were not finished pieces of writing but explorations and attempts to get closer to the novel. (10)

In so doing, the researchers used Purves' "four stages of response to literature": 1) engagement; 2) perception; 3) interpretation; and 4) evaluation (12). The researchers contend that:

All students could stand to do some clarifying of their lives, goals and beliefs before they rush into college work and learn to depend so heavily on the ideas of others. But basic writing students, especially, need to work through their own experiences and values to a sense that their ideas and opinions will, matter, along with those of many other people in this new academic community. If that many of these students are failing to make it, it could be because this community somehow never seems to find a way to include them. (18)

Basic writers are assigned the task of identifying their own ideas. To those writers, the thought process which it entails may seem unfamiliar but will, eventually, draw them into the academic mainstream.

Similarly, in their CCCC conference presentation, "Basic Writers as Critical Thinkers," Anstendig and Kimmel present a classroom model that will eventually draw basic writers into the mainstream of academia by:

...[building] an interactive environment where writing, reading, speaking, listening, thinking can be practiced together, and where...[they] can open students' minds to new ways of perceiving themselves and thinking about the world around them. (3)

These researchers design their curriculum to include:

...some activities and strategies to compel...[their] students to become more conscious of their own abstraction process and to learn new habits of inquiry. (4-5)

Anstendig and Kimmel combine language and thinking skills through "sequenced" assignments which build, finishing in a final research project (4-5). The initial assignment the researchers label "naming" (5). Here, students look at "...the familiar in a new way..." as they uncover the

"history...[and] significance of their [own] names" (5). Next, students describe photographs and identify what "...they...[have] learned about their [own] observing and perceiving processes" (6). In addition, students are reading various texts and writing "...carefully sequenced essays which...[require] naming, observing, perceiving, defining, and inferring" (7). Finally, the students are assigned a research project to "...actively...[engage them] in academic scholarship" (7). The researchers transport their students through thought processes, making those students aware of their accomplishments all along the way.

In order for basic writer's to ultimately develop a successful composing process, they need to employ all of the available composing tools. and inference is an essential composing tool. In Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World, Richard Paul defines "inference" as:

...a step of the mind, an intellectual act by which one concludes that something is so in light of something else's being so, or seeming to be so.  
(553)

C.A. Missimer elaborates upon this definition in Good Arguments by distinguishing between the two types of inference: 1) deductive which states that a "...conclusion should necessarily follow...[from] an all-encompassing reason"; and 2) inductive which states that a "...conclusion should likely follow...[from] enough particular cases..."

(70-74).

The basic writer needs to:

Keep in mind that the structures of all arguments...[are] the same. The main issue is brought to a conclusion, with at least one reason to support that conclusion. This structure is...simple, and we're using it all the time...we often refer to well-structured and well-supported arguments..[which] need to 'rest on solid ground.'  
(Missimer 20)

The basic writer mistakenly views the components of an argument as separate entities, associating an equal amount of importance to each entity (Missimer 20-21). Missimer suggests that novices may "...overcome this 'line by line' habit, [by] think[ing] of...[themselves] as always on a mission in search of the issue, conclusion, and reasons" (21). In addition, novices must learn to evaluate the inferences made in the argument and decide if those inferences are "warranted" or "accepted" based on the truth of the reasons and the conclusion's natural development from those reasons (Missimer 68).

Furthermore, in order for any development to take place in the basic writing classroom, both instructors and students must reject their preconceived notions about themselves and about each other. In order for inference to be identified as a valued component of that classroom, instructors must first allow themselves to "...change in response to students..." (Shaughnessy, "Diving" 234). Shaughnessy suggests that "traditionally prepared" English

instructors proceed through developmental stages as they experience the basic writer (234). The author identifies four stages: 1) retaining pedagogies used with more experienced writers; 2) perceiving the basic writer as an "empty slate" and responding by advocating simplistic prescriptions; 3) seeking an understanding of the basic writer's true difficulties; and 4) deciding that teaching the basic writer is a "suitable" and "challenging" profession (234-39). The third stage in this developmental model is crucial for the student because it is at this point that the instructor must identify the special needs of the basic writer and the most effective ways to introduce inferential reasoning skills into the basic writing classroom.



## Chapter 2: Basic Writing Textbooks and Their Role in Developing Inferential Reasoning Skills

Once instructors have made the decision to expand upon the definition of 'basic skills' and include the development of inferential logic into the basic writing curriculum, then they must consider the different approaches that are available to develop those more abstract areas of critical thought. If instructors choose to utilize a textbook as part of the course's organization, then they need to choose a text in which the author's philosophy of instruction matches the instructors' own pedagogical philosophies. A cursory survey of current textbooks identifies a variety which range from the purely grammatical to those which revolve around a process-oriented approach to writing.

For the purposes of this thesis, the process-oriented, recursive approach to writing is the approach that will be sought out in the writing texts. In "Understanding Composing," Sondra Perl recognizes the "recursiveness in writing" (114):

...throughout the process of writing, writers return to substrands of the overall process, or subroutines (short successions of steps that yield results on which the writer draws in taking the next set of steps); writers use these to keep the process moving forward...recursiveness in writing implies that there is a forward-moving action that exists by virtue of a backward-moving action. (114)

Research, in both writing and in critical thought, suggests that this global, non-linear approach provides students of

writing with a realistic arena in which to develop the more complex and abstract modes of thought, such as inference skills. This recursive element coincides with Neimark's suggestion that mature thinkers are able to move their thought process backwards and forwards--making sophisticated connections between the concrete and the abstract. This thinker is constantly shifting thoughts in order to measure the validity of those thoughts--weighing and measuring each idea against what is already known.

In Troubleshooting Basic Writing Skills, William Herman and Jeffrey M. Young offer an example of the 'traditional' grammatical approach to the instruction of basic writers. The authors state their "...hope that students who use...[this] book will not only learn to write correct sentences but also develop a feel for sentences" (Preface). Herman and Young cite the "rules of English composition" as "often troublesome to students" (Preface). In this fourth edition, the authors identify the improved areas of their text:

...we have expanded our coverage of subjects, verbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and clauses. We have added material on comma splices and auxiliary verbs. We have also added a section on homonyms. There are two helpful reference guides...The first contains various charts that will assist you with pronouns, prepositions, nouns, clauses, contractions, verbs, and spelling. The second contains a Glossary of Terms that will review all the rules and terms learned throughout this course of study. (Preface)

Herman and Young claim that their text "...makes no assumptions about students' knowledge and provides students with numerous, varied opportunities for success" (Preface). However, the authors' concentration upon the sentence as the unit of measurement for basic writing competency does assume that basic writers must be taught in the traditional linear fashion which begins with an emphasis on "correctness" (Brannon 18).

Concentrating upon units as isolated as the sentence, in fact, does little toward encouraging the types of thought in which mature thinkers are engaged and does little towards identifying and correcting the true difficulties of basic writers. Exercises in this text, therefore, limit the students' access to the development of inferential reasoning skills. For example, Herman and Young explain to the student that:

The tense of a verb shows the time when the action happened - past, present, or future. Many verbs can be changed from the present tense by adding -d (if the word already ends in e) or -ed to its end. These verbs are called regular verbs. (11)

The authors continue their explanation by defining and giving examples for the present, past, and future tenses. The students are then instructed to change such verbs as "smile," "explore," "shock," "describe," and "endure" from "the present tense into the past tense by adding -d or -ed to the end" (11). Students are also asked to "fill in the

blanks" with the "...appropriate past or present tense verb," i.e., "Last night I \_\_\_\_\_ a perfect game" and "Jason \_\_\_\_\_ to the music for so long that his feet had blisters" (13). Students are finally asked to write their own sentences using the past tense of "invite," "mark," "stretch," "graduate," "explore," "discover," etc. (13). Exercises such as these do not provide a forum for abstract thought.

Herman and Young do not direct any attention toward "fluency" or "clarity" (areas in which inferential reasoning skills may be developed) but concentrate only upon "correctness" (Brannon 18). The "correctness" aspect of the writing process needs to be dealt with, but it should not be dealt with to the exclusion of "fluency" or "clarity" (Brannon 18). By dealing with only a limited portion of the writing process, Herman and Young suggest to the basic writer that the writing and thought processes are linear and do not maintain any of the recursive value which most researchers feel is the essential characteristic of those processes and which encourages the development of inference skills. Although the Herman and Young text, and others like it, are excellent supplements to the basic writing curriculum--providing basic writers with instruction and examples for correctness--they are not valuable organizing tools for that curriculum.

Similar to the Herman and Young text is The Complete Sentence Workout Book by Fitzpatrick, Ruscica, and Fitzpatrick. Here, the authors have created a text:

...designed for the diverse group of student writers enrolled in college composition courses... directed...to basic students, who need a reliable and effective workbook of grammar and punctuation, and to traditional freshman-composition students, who need to be reminded of fundamental concepts. (v)

The "fundamental concepts" which are defined by the authors consist of the "traditional [course in] grammar and punctuation" (v). The attitudes of the authors, however, differ significantly from the attitudes of Herman and Young where the concentration is exclusively upon the "correctness" of sentence structure. In the Fitzpatrick, Ruscica, and Fitzpatrick text the authors claim to use a "sequential" method where students progress from the beginning level to more "complex" levels of achievement (v). The authors:

...believe that such a sequential method ensures success and inspires confidence...[and] encourage[s] students to construct their own rules and sentences...identifying concepts and...developing sentences [which] helps students apply principles they have learned. (v)

Although the authors' initial concentration is upon the sentence, they perceive the basic writer as having the ability to make logical inferences and encourage those students to do so.

This text culminates in a chapter dealing with the

composing process as a whole (which the Herman and Young text ignores). Although the authors compact this discussion into only one chapter, they still are able to reinforce inference skills in the basic writer. Rather than having the student 'fill in the blank' with the appropriate verb (which they have done in previous chapters and which is similar to the format which Herman and Young use), in this final chapter the authors increase the complexity of the assignments and require the students to make appropriate inferences based on the information given to them. For example, the students are asked to:

Label each set of topics below from 1 for the most general to 5 for the most specific. Make sure that...[the] stages of development are logical and that each topic really narrows the one preceding it.  
(376)

The topics are given as follows:

\_\_\_\_\_ Facades of New York skyscrapers  
\_\_\_\_\_ Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_ Urban architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_ Skyscrapers in New York  
\_\_\_\_\_ Emergence of classical influences on facades  
of New York skyscrapers (376)

Although this type of an exercise may seem almost simplistic, it does ask the students to draw upon areas of inductive and deductive logic in order to successfully complete the task. The students must activate what Paul refers to as "...a step of the mind..." (Changing 553) in order to organize and structure even these simple elements.

Fitzpatrick, Ruscica, and Fitzpatrick continue to

encourage the basic writers' development as mature thinkers by designing writing assignments which involve logical transitions of thought:

Public transportation is convenient in a highly developed society like the United States, but some people prefer to drive private cars. In a proposal to campus administrators, explain why some students prefer to drive private cars to campus rather than use public transportation. Argue for more parking spaces on campus. (388)

Clothing often reveals what people think about themselves; moreover, people are often judged by the way they dress. In an essay for a popular magazine, such as Vogue, GQ, or Mademoiselle, explain how clothing is used in these two ways. (388)

In order for basic writers to complete these questions successfully, they must take on the characteristics which Neimark attributes to the mature thinker and be: 1) transformative--move from the actual concrete definition of public transportation and construct the abstract reasons why some students would not prefer it over private transportation; 2) systematic--organize the paper in a way that is conducive to public transportation and to the proposal format; 3) detached--argue for private transportation even though they may personally prefer the opposite view; 4) evaluative--identify their own arguments' 'soundness' when compared to similar arguments on transportation; and 5) able to "put it all together"--actively experience the thought process that they went through to arrive at the argument on public transportation (49-56). Fitzpatrick, Ruscica, and

Fitzpatrick make an effort to include the basic writer as an active participant in the writing process and to foster an interchange between writing and critical thought. Although the authors recognize the need of basic writers to experience assignments which foster abstract thought, the text does not rely sufficiently upon the integration of the thinking, reading, and writing processes as the vehicles for developing such thought. Their text, therefore, is insufficient as an organizing tool for the basic writing curriculum.

Mary Spangler and Rita Werner provide a more inclusive text--one which incorporates practices in fluency (early on in the text), clarity, and correctness. In Paragraph Strategies: A Basic Writing Guide, they:

...recognize that writing is not a purely linear process although the steps are arranged that way. Students are encouraged to weave back and forth through all the stages once they as writers have experienced them as a systematic and total process.  
(vii)

Spangler and Werner's text develops from the underlying assumption that the writing and thought processes are recursive by nature and that these processes must be interconnected in order for the basic writer to establish a firm foothold in academia.

As with the Fitzgerald, Ruscica, Fitzgerald text, the Spangler and Werner text asks the writer to use reason in the exercises. As with the previous text, the basic writer



is asked to "Rearrange...items into a logical order...  
[where] several items might be placed under more than one  
level" (33-6):

Subject: bicycling  
get in shape  
lose weight  
win trophies  
tone the muscles  
sprints  
racing  
long-distance races  
win money  
sightsee  
the countryside  
narrow streets  
old towns (6-7)

Again, although almost simplistic, the student must call upon basic elements of inductive and deductive reasoning in order to complete the task. Even though the unit of measurement in this text appears to be the paragraph, the authors are not as concerned with the "correctness" aspect, but instead they create a sense in their text that writing is a process based in thought and reason.

Spangler and Werner carry the basic writer along in a process by drawing upon different aspects of that process at different intervals--intervals not always sequenced logically in the mind of the writer. In Chapter 8, "Writing the Essay," the authors suggest to the students that the place to begin writing for the essay is with the body paragraphs rather than the introduction because, they explain to the student, "...you want to know what material

you are including before you introduce it" (162). After that, the introduction and conclusion may be dealt with. Finally, all is put together in order to form the completed essay. In this way, students are encouraged to develop connections between the writing and the thinking processes, and they are encouraged to draw upon their own inference abilities as building blocks in those processes.

Spangler and Werner's text does not expand upon the definition of 'basic skills' to the extent that it incorporates reading into the writing and thinking processes. Their text does not attempt to familiarize students with the skills that are needed for them to become active readers and, thereby, enlist the inference strategies which can "...put them at the center of their own learning..." (Gross, Kiniry, and Rose iii). If an instructor's goal is to acquire a text based around a pedagogical philosophy which establishes the basic writer as an inferential reasoner, then the text must, from cover to cover, provide the student with a forum--exercises, readings, and practices--in which to develop and manipulate inference skills. It must also give students the opportunity to explore, in depth, those inferences.

There are, however, many texts on the market that do provide the organizing element for the basic writing curriculum--an element based in processes and explorations.

One such text is The Writer's Express: A Paragraph and Essay Text with Readings by Kathleen T. McWhorter.

McWhorter's text provides a complete course in reading, thinking, interpreting, reacting, and writing (xxiii). The author explains the following:

To succeed in college, in the workplace, and in today's information-laden society, students must be able to express their ideas clearly and correctly in written form. The Writer's Express teaches developmental students the fundamentals of paragraph and essay writing through structured, sequential instruction and practice. The text approaches writing as a process...The text stresses writing as the effective expression of ideas; correct grammar and mechanics are presented as tools for achieving effective expression, rather than as ends in themselves...Although writing skills are vitally important, they are not sufficient to handle the demands of college coursework. (xxiii)

McWhorter continues:

Students must also be able to read, think critically, and interpret and react to what they have read...essential skills--writing, reading, and critical thinking--are most effectively taught when integrated. Many students need help to "see" the connections among these skills; they need instruction that emphasizes connections, overlap, and cross-applications. They also need to build a repertoire of thinking strategies useful for writing, as well as reading. (xxiii)

McWhorter accomplishes all of this by organizing the text to fit her philosophy. Chapters include: 1) readings--which are at the center of many of the assignments; 2) preparation writing strategies--which prepare students to write about the readings; 3) writing assignments--which involve students "reacting" to the readings; 4) revision checklists--which

review writing strategies; 5) writing success tips--which incorporate "practical" advice; 6) skill refreshers--which provide a grammar review; 7) assessment exercises--which assess the students' writings; 8) visual learning aids--which include idea maps; and 9) student writing samples--which establish "realistic expectations" for the students' own writings (xxiv-xxvi). McWhorter's text addresses the true difficulties of the basic writer, and she develops a comprehensive text that integrates reading, writing, and critical thinking components. These will ultimately help to develop the basic writer's inference skills and will create, for that writer, a learning foundation that can be applied and transferred to all areas of study.

In Chapter 1, McWhorter offers the basic writing student the opportunity to experience the rewards of journal writing and explains:

A writing journal is a fun, exciting, and meaningful way to improve your writing, keep track of your thoughts and ideas, and develop a source of ideas to write about. Writing in your journal can also add a new dimension to the way you think about events in your daily life. (11)

McWhorter continues:

Journal writing gives you experience in using writing to think about ideas, react to problems, and discover solutions. You'll learn to use writing to discover and sort out ideas, adding a new dimension to the way you think. (12)

The author provides students with the chance, early on, to discover those "new dimensions" of thought and of writing.

The students are encouraged to acknowledge and manipulate inferences from their own daily activities. McWhorter combines the processes of thinking and writing into a non-reductionistic process which basic writers are encouraged to explore--beginning with what they already know and projecting, and revising, that knowledge into an academic situation.

McWhorter develops the text from a philosophy of knowledge that encourages this inclusive approach to reading, writing, and thinking. She explains that good writing:

...is much more than just avoiding errors...[it] is a thinking process...[which] involves experimentation and change...[and] rethinking ideas and making changes in what...[is] said as well as improving the way...[it is] expressed... (3)

And, McWhorter provides students with the opportunity to consciously experience those processes of thinking and writing:

Suppose you have just been asked to write a one-page paper on street crime for your criminology course. Describe, step-by-step, how you would go about doing this assignment. (What is the first thing you would do? What would you do after that, and so forth?) (7)

Students learn right away that there is an organized process to their thinking--whatever that organization may be at this point. McWhorter continues to lead the students into the conscious aspects of their own writings.

To that end, McWhorter avidly promotes critical reading

as an avenue for the development of abstract thought. She suggests to her students that the section in each Chapter entitled "Thinking Before Reading":

...introduces you to the reading that follows. It will ask you to skim quickly through the article before you read it. This skimming method is called previewing. As you preview, try to discover what the reading is about and how it is organized. Then, you will create a mental outline of the key ideas it covers. After you have previewed the article, you'll find several questions designed to activate your thinking--or put your mind in gear. Use these questions to discover what you already know about the subject of the reading. Once you have started thinking about the subject, reading about it will be easier and more enjoyable. (8)

As with Axelrod and Cooper, McWhorter presents reading as an active process that should involve the student's thought process and not merely require the summarization or the reiteration of details. Students are brought through the entire writing and thinking processes--always integrating reading and critical thought tactics and never concentrating solely on the correctness aspect of the writing process. As the text concludes, however, McWhorter does provide a section called "Reviewing the Basics" which gives some help to the student for reviewing nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, interjections, etc.

McWhorter continually draws students through the writing process by asking them to expand upon their own inference skills--strengthening those skills with each

exercise. The following are assignments from Chapter 14,  
"Writing Persuasive Essays":

For three of the following issues, take a position  
and generate ideas to support it.

1. increasing the national speed limit to 65 mph
2. the rights of insurance companies to deny  
medical coverage
3. banning smoking in public places
4. outlawing sports hunting of wild animals
5. mandatory counseling for drunken drivers  
(297-98)

Next, students are asked to elaborate:

For one of the issues you chose...[in the above  
exercise], identify an audience that you would like  
to convince of your position. Think of a specific  
person or group. Then analyze your audience and  
summarize your findings. (298)

The students are asked to continue their ideas by writing  
"...a thesis statement for the issue..." that the students  
chose in the preceding exercise (300). The students are  
then asked to "generate evidence to support the thesis  
statement" and "evaluate...the topic further" before they  
write the first draft of the essay (303). McWhorter  
intersperses explanations and examples into the text while  
building upon the students' accumulating knowledge. The  
assignments incorporate:

...activities and strategies to compel...students to  
become more conscious of their own abstraction  
process and to learn new habits of inquiry.  
(Anstendig and Kimmel 4-5)

McWhorter compiles readings, examples and exercises which  
expose the basic writers to inference tactics and which

encourage them toward developing a sophisticated understanding and execution of the writing and thinking processes. McWhorter's text provides an inclusive course in writing, thinking, and reading which can serve as the organizing tool in the basic writing classroom.

If inferential skills development is the goal of the basic writing classroom, then a text needs to be chosen that integrates reading, writing, and thinking into a process-oriented, all-inclusive classroom experience. In so doing, instructors need to search out and identify those basic writing textbooks which come closest to incorporating this pedagogical philosophy.



### Chapter 3: The Ways That Inferential Skills Help Students to Develop Texts

In order to be successful at writing tasks, basic writers must learn to utilize inferential reasoning skills both when evaluating the arguments of others and when constructing their own arguments. Composing unified, logical prose requires the simultaneous interaction of multiple levels of the thought process which the basic writer must learn to coordinate and manipulate. Writers must consider the answers to a number of questions before they even begin to write. For instance, in The Persuasive Pen: An Integrated Approach to Reasoning and Writing, Nancy Carrick and Lawrence Finsen suggest that in any "rhetorical situation" the writer must ask:

1. How do I discover what I want to say?
2. How do I want to affect my audience?
3. How can I present my ideas so that my audience considers them?
4. How do I want my readers to regard me? (8)

In so doing, the writer must:

...attend to four elements: the context of the topic, the purpose(s) for writing, the expectations, uses, knowledge, and attitudes of the audience, and the persona of the writer. (37)

These questions and acknowledgements require not only a sophisticated understanding of inference tools but a thorough grasp of the writing process. Ultimately, basic writers must learn to ask questions and to identify and coordinate those aspects of their readings and writings

which will strengthen their understanding and effectiveness as critical thinkers, writers, and readers. They must not only learn to identify and coordinate the tools which are provided to them, but they must use those tools consistently.

The student essays which will be analyzed in this chapter are selected from a group of basic writing final exams. This is a departmental, holistically-graded final which is given at a community college. The exam questions are created by the Departmental English Exam Committee. Students are asked to review a short reading and respond to a two- or three-part essay question that is generated from that reading.

In this case, students were given a two-hour time limit in which they were asked to do the following:

- After reading "The Trophy Syndrome" [Appendix A], write an essay of at least 300 words in which you
- (1) summarize in your own words Samuelson's position on the use of awards and rankings and,
  - (2) using illustrations from your own experience, argue for or against his position.

This particular assignment asks students to exercise their prowess in the reading, writing, and thinking processes. The assignment itself sets up an argumentative situation where students are asked to display their own inductive abilities. The students are asked to move beyond that stage which Chaffee describes as merely "reporting...information

[summarization]" and into the inferential stage of "...[describing] what is not currently known" (336). These basic writers are ultimately being asked to "judge" a particular situation and express their own "...evaluation based on certain criteria" (Chaffee 336). The first step in this assignment, summarizing, provides the basic writers with an opportunity to identify what Carrick and Finsen regard as the "context of the topic" (37). Initially, the student must define the "issue" or "what is being claimed or talked about" (Missimer 16) in Samuelson's argument, and they must identify the "conclusion" of the argument or the "decision" (Missimer 18) that Samuelson has made in his treatment of the subject. Unless the students are predisposed to be critical readers and, thus critical thinkers, they will be unable to "visualize" (Missimer 20) the structure of that argument. In so doing, the students must realize that "...certain types of sentences are always going to be more important than others" (Missimer 21). They must, according to Missimer, "...overcome...[a] 'line by line' habit...[and] think of...[themselves] as always on a mission in search of the issue, conclusion, and reasons" (21). Basic writers must accept the idea, in both their own writings and in the writings of others, that the reasoning structure is dynamic. Missimer explains:

...Think of statements as analogous to pieces of lumber. Just as a board can be made a part of the

wall or part of the ceiling, so a statement can be a reason or a conclusion. It depends on what the builder (arguer) decides to do with it. (25)

Once students have identified the issue in the reading, they can then begin to create, or structure, a personal argument.

The second part of the departmental essay question asks students to continue their train of reasoning and compose accordingly. The students are given a generalization, developed from particulars, and asked to support or reject that generalization--constructing their own argument with personal particulars. In order to decide which position to take, the students must be savvy enough to ask Missimer's questions about Samuelson's argument: 1) "Are the particular cases or the claim of 'most' true, as far as you know?" 2) "Are there enough particular cases to justify making a generalization?" and 3) "Does the generalization follow from those particulars?" (74). Students must base their:

...decision on the available evidence, on...[their] reasoning powers, and on...[their] experience--  
...[their] personal experience and  
claims...[they've] heard and read from among the  
community of thinkers and believe to be reliable.  
(Missimer 78)

Basic writers need to assimilate all the tools and skills they have developed and present them in a way, in the case of the departmental exam, that is acceptable to academia.

An examination of the following student essay reveals major errors in reasoning skills. The student responds to

Samuelson's essay:

In my opinion, I think that at the time that the school board of Fairfax County, Virginia recieved a complaint from the high-school students and principals, in regard to the unfairness of class ranking. Samuelson sounds like he was one of the students who disapproved of class ranking and awards to, because he didn't like the way his performance was being judged. In this case, I would have to argue for his position. Because I don't feel or agree with the ones who over look people who work hard for their position. I feel that your average or good performances and abilities should speak for you, not a scale that doesn't recognizes averages and abilities. In reading the article "The Trophy Syndrome" I'm reminded of the Nursing program here at...the way they rank students. I also feel like their not fair with the way they do things. I think that when a student comes to enter the nursing program with all the necessary requirements fulfilled. I don't think that he or she should have to competit against other students or be placed on a waiting list because another student has higher grades. I think it should be based on first come first serve, especially if you have meet all the necessary requirements. As in the case of the Trophy Syndrome. So that's why I would have to argue for Samuelson. I think that a person's ability, performances, and...should be recognized. After a person has worked hard, spend long hours preparing for whatever task her or she has to face. And on top of that, accomplishes whatever he or she has set out to do. These are the kind of things that shouldn't be overlooked, just because the system says that things should be done a certain way. All people should speak up about things that they don't agree with in a assertive way. Also, I don't think that people always need someone to praise them or pat them on the back all the time for whatever they do. But sometimes people should be recognized for their ability and how well he or she perform in whatever they do, especially if he or she proves himself to be worthy of praise.

Although the student appears to understand the issue, he has misinterpreted Samuelson's conclusion--he has missed the main point of Samuelson's argument. Here, the student does

not go beyond a fragmented interpretation of Samuelson's argument and, in so doing, does not provide a complete summarization of that text. The student is not able to infer correctly because of an inaccurate, or incomplete, reading of Samuelson's text. (A close look at Samuelson's text, however, does reveal that the student's conclusion is correct for the first paragraph only--suggesting that an incomplete reading of the text is, in fact, a strong possibility.) The student fails to evaluate the clues which appear in the story.

Missimer suggests that "...titles offer the first clues about what a...[story] will argue" (26). In this case, the writer has completely ignored the story's title, "The Trophy Syndrome," and all its connotations of abnormalities. In addition, the student is not able to make the leap from Samuelson's set of particulars and to clearly identify the general conclusion of the text (Missimer 73). Instead, the student sizes up Samuelson's argument:

Samuelson sounds like he was one of the students who disapproved of class ranking and awards to, because he didn't like the way his performance was being judged. In this case, I would have to argue for this position...I feel that your average or good performances and abilities should speak for you, not a scale that doesn't recognizes averages and abilities.

The student then interprets the argument to suit his own purposes. In so doing, he becomes almost preachy in his emotional appeal. He weakens his argument's structure by

developing an almost "ad hominem" attack (Corbett 78)--in this case, upon the Nursing Program, as an entity, for its unfairness to the students. The student is, in essence, discounting the Nursing Program by "attacking" its "character" rather than concentrating upon the actual issues (Corbett 78). This student is unable to decide if his, or Samuelson's, argument is warranted. It appears as though this student does not take the time to ask the 'right' questions--the questions which will help him interpret Samuelson's argument and the questions which will help him develop a coherent, well-structured argument of his own. Although this basic writer may be making inferences in other aspects of his life, he is unable to make the inferential connections which are needed for this particular writing assignment. He seems unaware of the abstract processes which he must go through in order to successfully complete the writing task.

Similarly, the student author of the following essay is not aware of the abstract processes that she needs to enlist in order to construct a successful essay. In the following essay the student completely ignores the summation responsibility and, therefore, is unable to construct an argument of her own that is solidly based in the reading. Rather than summarizing Samuelson's argument and using that summation as a launching point, i.e. composing tool, she

plunges immediately into her own experience:

Awards, ranking and trophy's are good in some ways, and bad in other ways.

My brother was on a baseball team when he was about ten years old. He loved to play baseball but he really wasn't that good at all. All the other team players where so mean they would make fun of him because he couldn't run fast. The reason he could not run fast is because his left foot was longer than his right foot. I felt so sorry for him because he really liked to play. At the end of the season they all got trophys and I think that is good because if my brother would have not gotten one and everybody else did he would have been so upset and I think that would have been very mean to single someone out. So he gets a trophy and he feels better about himself and I think that is good.

The student does not coordinate Samuelson's text with her own writing; thus, she does not draw upon the inference skills which are necessary in order to complete the assignment successfully and to make her an active thinker.

In addition, the student ignores, or misunderstands, another important instruction. She never clearly chooses a "for or against" focus for her paper. Consequently, she cannot control the direction of her own thoughts enough to provide the reader with adequate justification for her position. She continues by launching immediately into her negative issue:

I also think it is bad in some ways. I had a boyfriend in high school that was on the football team. He was totally obsessed with this game. He had to be on the team but you had to have a high grade average to be on the team and if he had not gotten on the team he would have just died. It was so much presure on him. I think we have enough presure as it is at school but to have so much presure just to play a sport. I think it is so dum.



I think they should be able to play no matter what.  
I think it's really dumb that you have to have a high  
grade just to play a game.

The student is not able to direct the focus of her own argument. Instead, she leaps from one particular to another, interrupting the audience's concentration with transitions that are too abrupt. In this instance, the audience does not get the chance to even consider the ideas which are presented by the student because of the student's lack of visualization in structuring her argument. She has not asked the right questions of Samuelson's text or of her own text. Consequently, she does not produce a coherent, organized, and detailed essay. She does not exhibit the foresight to visualize the possible affect that her argument will have on her audience or to make the inferences needed to display to her audience an argument which is sound and logically developed.

In general the weaker papers, the papers which do not diagnose the rhetorical situation correctly and which do not utilize inference skills as composing tools, show a disregard for the initial reading, i.e. hasty reading of the Samuelson text or a misinterpretation of that text. These students do not make the connection between the reading and writing processes and the subsequent interplay and dependence that they entail. The students seem to avoid the reading or dismiss it as inconsequential in order to begin

developing their own arguments--arguments which are inappropriate because of the students' initial hastiness.

In the following essay, however, the student has a clearer picture of what the reasoner as writer needs in order to successfully complete this task:

An essay by Robert Samuelson illustrates his feelings of unfairness in the ranking system of life. Samuelson feels that competition and ranking has gotten out of hand, to the point where students shy away from demanding courses and teachers. But he also feels that competition can be useful. A little praise and a pat on the back, along with a few trophies are good. As long as childish customs are not perpetuated, and trophies and rankings are earned and not bestowed.

I can only agree with Samuelson, to bestow easy A's in class or trophies for just showing up does not inspire an individual to work hard and achieve. My children just loved a particular grade school teacher, who was a kind hearted old soul. She bestowed upon them lavishly good grades. They had her wrapped around their little fingers. But when it came time to move on they did, but without the foundation and knowledge that they needed. It was not long before they realized that in the next grade level they had to work hard to achieve. The next grade level was taught by a man, who was not so easy to manipulate.

They along with other children were put on the spot, to recite multiplication tables out loud, or to name off English grammar which they did not know. Many parents were getting complaints about this teacher. He was just too hard on the children, something had to be done. When he was called into a conference with the parents he was only doing what had to be done on that grade level. It was realized by other parents and myself that on previous grade levels not enough hard work had been emphasized. That year the children had to relearn their study habits, they had to study harder in order to keep up. They ended up with good grades that year, but with a big difference, they earned them. They have since moved on taking with them a very important lesson in school and life. You must work hard to achieve.

The same goes for little league softball. My son is involved with that. In the early years just showing up and trying were rewarded. Then when it was important to win, winning was rewarded. The coach's outlook was that it wasn't important how you won or acted as long as you won. Finally being older and moving on to Pony league they got a gem of a coach. Jeff, being of military background whipped them into shape. He laid down rules that were followed to the letter. If anyone was late for practice, that individual had to run a lap for every person in the team. Everyone had to stand up straight no slouching and so forth. Nothing got by him, as a result they turned into a very well disciplined team. On the field as well as off the playing field, they were taught a good life's lesson. Their team was hard to beat. When they came out to play they looked like a team of little soldiers. They looked intimidating. I think that's what helped them win a lot of their games. With them they took a good lesson, you must work hard to achieve.

I'm thankful to those people, even though at the time I did not think so. I'm thankful to them for instilling in my children what I should have instilled in them. Also I have learned from this, coming back to school the same thought rings in my mind, you must work hard to achieve.

Here, the student begins with an accurate reading and a fairly concise summary which ends in the identification of Samuelson's conclusion--that awards and praise are more meaningful when they are "earned and not bestowed." The student is able to accurately identify the issue, conclusion, and reasons which Samuelson gives for his viewpoint, and she is able to "visualize" the structure which her own argument will take in support of Samuelson's conclusion. This student uses Samuelson's text as a tool for composing. She combines the reading, writing, and critical thinking processes to increase the essay's

effectiveness.

After she identifies the issue and the author's conclusion, she immediately constructs an argument that is in agreement with Samuelson's. This student is able to make appropriate inferences from her own experiences and transplant those inferences into the academic context. She structures her essay around two particular examples--her children's grade school teacher and her son's little league coach. For both examples, the student chooses appropriate details to support her stance. She ties the particulars together by being careful to make smooth transitions between the paragraphs--a caution which carries the audience along with her through her argument. The student creates a pattern within her argument by tying her particulars together with her conclusion--"You must work hard to achieve." This pattern indicates that she is conscious of what she wants to say to support her conclusion, and she is conscious of that conclusion throughout her paper. The student seems able to visualize the structure that her argument is going to take, and at the same time, she seems to be very aware that there is an audience who will accept or discard the argument based on the student's own management of that argument.

Unlike the first two students, this writer is able to adequately control the direction of her thoughts. She

involves herself in the logistical process of inference by moving into that stage of "...[describing] what is not currently known" (Chaffee 336). She is able to shift her thoughts from the concrete to the abstract, and she is able to explore and clarify the proposed topic in relation to her own experiences.

In the next essay, the student also accurately identifies and elicits the proper inferential thinking skills in developing her own argument:

In the article, "The Trophy Syndrome," the author Robert Samuelson talks about how many students, principals, and parents consider class rankings and trophies unfair. He states a few negative views on the subject. A high school principal says that kids shy away from difficult courses because of the fear of working hard and only receiving a low ranking. Also a parent complains about trophies not reflecting how well you play, or even whether you play in a soccer league. The solution students, principals, and parents should like is to just eliminate rankings and trophies altogether. The author feels that these complaints are somewhat true, but he is against taking away rankings and trophies. In my opinion, Robert Samuelson is right. We should have rankings and trophies in order to get students, workers, or players to give his or her work full effort, and to help everyone recognize his or her mistakes to correct them.

First of all, I feel that ranking and trophies helped me to give my full effort in almost anything I did. Whether it was in school, at work, or at piano practice, I gave my superiors the best work I could. In school, I knew that giving my all would get me good grades, and it did. Also practice, practice, practice gave me all the first place trophies I could ever hope for at all my piano recitals. Rankings and trophies are there for a person to work harder and build self confidence, not to put them down. People have to learn to handle disappointment and to actually benefit from it.

Everyone should learn mistakes are not the end of the world, but mistakes are small setbacks that he or she must improve on.

Not only should rankings and trophies help people to work harder, but they also should help people to recognize mistakes. When a person does so, he or she should realize the mistake as a setback and not as a failure. A person should learn to improve their work in order to avoid the same mistakes. As for me, I didn't always do well. When I made mistakes in school, I would always correct them. I feel that I have improved a great deal since my earlier high school years.

The author is right in saying that we shouldn't lead ourselves into believing we are doing fine. If the truth is evident and states otherwise, then we should realize it and not fool ourselves. In high school, I fooled myself into believing I was doing better than one teacher was telling me in math. I found out I was wrong the hard way. I applied to a university and was not accepted because of my low math scores. This major disappointment was all because I believed I was better than the rank my teacher was giving me. Instead of giving myself too much credit, I should have improved my math skills, which is something everyone should do, improve his or her skills, to become better students, workers, and players.

As with the student writer of the previous essay, this student provides a concise summarization of Samuelson's argument. She includes enough details from Samuelson's text in her own summarization to lead her audience into her own avenue of reasoning:

In my opinion, Robert Samuelson is right. We should have rankings and trophies in order to get students, workers, or players to give his or her work full effort, and to help everyone recognize his or her mistakes to correct them.

This student has recognized, from Samuelson's text, that the inability to accept disappointment in a realistic framework is detrimental to the development of the individual. The

student has inferred correctly from Samuelson's text and uses it to diagnose and expand upon this particular rhetorical situation.

She structures her essay around the idea that competition was beneficial in her life, and she infers from this that it should be beneficial to everyone. She makes a logical appeal to her audience (an appeal which lacks the "preachy" tone of the first student essay) by citing poignant examples from her own life. By citing appropriate particulars to support her conclusion and by controlling the tone of the essay, this student allows her audience to be taken along in her train of thought and gives herself a credible persona. Her audience will consider her ideas because of the logistical competency that she has used in presenting them.

This student is able to sequester the dynamic elements of language and thought, and she is able to reflect upon dramatic and recursive shifts of ideas. She supports Samuelson's ideas with logical shifts in her own reasoning from the abstract to the concrete and back again. She begins:

First of all, I feel that ranking and trophies helped me to give my full effort in almost anything I did...practice, practice, practice gave me all the first place trophies I could ever hope for...Rankings and trophies are there for a person to work harder and build self confidence, not to put them down.

Here, the student increases the reader's awareness of the purpose and effectiveness of a merit system. She begins by identifying the abstract concept (merits benefit the individual), supports that concept with a specific detail (trophies she won at piano recitals), and reverts back to an abstraction (trophies are meant to build self-confidence). She is able to explore Samuelson's text in relation to her own set of criteria.

The stronger student papers, papers which obviously enlist inference techniques in their structuring, begin with a thorough understanding of the reading. These writers are able to comprehend the material and analyze the basic argument structure--issues and conclusion. These students identify the clues which are given by the original text and incorporate them into their own writings. These students are also conscious of the questions that need to be asked of their own texts and the texts of others. They have mastered the skills which help them to present their ideas so that their audience will consider them, and these students carry the audience along on a logical and sophisticated train of reasoning.

Successful writers will ultimately learn to identify and utilize inferential thinking skills. In their essays, inferential skills will serve to structure the writing task. Those skills will create a definition for the essay by



provoking justified arguments. In addition, those skills will interweave processes of thinking, writing and reading into an inclusive, analytic and systematic classroom experience.

#### Chapter 4: What Else Can Be Done?

If inferential reasoning skills are accepted as an important organizing principle in the basic writing classroom, then instructors must constantly seek out and develop new avenues towards encouraging this type of abstract thought. In so doing, instructors need to discard their old biases and attitudes about the skills' level of the basic writer and extend the basic writing curriculum beyond that which is traditionally considered appropriate, i.e. grammar drills, remedial readings, etc. Instructors need to help the basic writer in formulating a cohesive set of inferential reasoning skills which are essential if that writer is going to develop the characteristics which are attributed to the experienced writer.

Basic writers need to be encouraged to acquire the traits which are characteristic of that experienced writer. In "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," Nancy Sommers suggests that there are, in fact, identifiable differences between the student and the experienced writer. Sommers suggests that inexperienced writers concentrate their efforts upon the local level (sentence level) whereas experienced writers look toward globality (the whole text) in their writing (120-27). Sommers states that the reason for the basic difference between the two groups is that the student writer sees the

writing process as composed of linear stages (122). The linear model, by its nature, forces the student writer into believing that writing is composed of separate stages--not to be overlapped with any other stage (119). In contrast, experienced adult writers view the writing process as an "holistic" endeavor (126). This enables them to incorporate various phases of the process into each other, thus making it recursive (127). Experienced writers have "...a sense of writing as discovery--a repeated process of beginning over again, starting out new--that the students failed to have" (127).

In order for basic writers to develop the characteristics of the experienced writers, they must experience the reading, writing, and thinking processes in unison. Although basic writers have special needs, they still must function effectively in academia. Instructors must make these writers aware of the abilities they already possess and unite those abilities with the writing process. In addition, basic writers need to be challenged by the curriculum and not kept in a 'remedial' environment. It appears that a reasonably sound way to enhance the basic writers' experiences is to borrow from what has traditionally been confined to the more advanced writing classrooms and to incorporate that material into the basic writing curriculum. Moreover, if a recursive, global model

of the writing process is accepted, then this approach to the basic writing classroom is inevitable.

In Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing: A Brief Guide to Argument, Barnet and Bedau create a text which helps students search for "...hidden assumptions, [while] noticing various facets, unraveling different strands, and evaluating what is most significant" about argumentation (3). Most traditionally used as an advanced writing textbook, it can offer valuable suggestions and challenging exercises which will increase the basic writer's inference skills. For example, Barnet and Bedau explain:

In thinking about a problem, it's useful to jot down your ideas. Seeing your ideas on paper--even in the briefest form--will help bring other ideas to mind, and will also help you to evaluate them. For instance, after jotting down ideas as they come and responses to them, (1) you might go on to organize them into two lists, pro and con; (2) next, you might delete ideas that, when you come to think about them, strike you as simply wrong or irrelevant; and (3) then you might simply develop those ideas that strike you as pretty good. (4-5)

Here, the emphasis is upon the thought process as a whole and upon the idea that the writer is in control of the writing--an idea which often may elude the basic writer.

In the teaching guide which accompanies Critical Strategies for Academic Thinking and Writing, Gross, Kiniry and Rose present strategies which attempt to activate the reading, writing, and thinking processes in advanced writing students and which can be used to do so in the basic writing

classroom. The text suggests to instructors that they make their students aware of their unique learning patterns. The authors encourage students to keep a journal. They also suggest that students:

...may feel as if they're rather randomly collecting bits and pieces of information, ideas, and observations. You may want to point out that although this process feels fragmented, it is, in fact, the way knowledge is gained and research is done. If you ask students to think about their own history as learners, they may come to realize that their own learning has not happened in a simple linear pattern but has been cumulative and recursive. You might profitably spend part of a class discussing this personal learning history.

(2)

This type of an assignment gives basic writers the opportunity to see that although their world, or writing process, may appear fragmented, it is, in fact, the entire picture which comes together through these many fragments.

The authors also suggest that the readings in the textbook were selected and edited:

...with the intention of helping students develop the ability to write about academic material...The readings in this volume...are similar in kind to the readings students will encounter through their first few years in college. (9-10)

Again, the focus is upon the total college experience and the text is created to transcend the writing course, or the basic writing course, and help students explore the other dimensions of their academic and personal worlds.

In the Axelrod and Cooper text, Reading Critically, Writing Well: A Reader and Guide, the focus is on

developing critical reading strategies as an avenue for effective composing. Since the majority of writing that the writer must do in college revolves around subject-specific reading material (i.e. science, history, literature, etc.), the authors explain that their text:

...provides readings for a college writing course. But more than that, it teaches specific strategies for critical reading, enabling students to analyze thoughtfully the readings in this text and in their other college courses. We assume that college students should learn to think and read critically and that as they become better critical readers, they will also become more effective writers. To this instruction in reading, we add comprehensive guidance in writing, helping students to understand and manage the composing process--from invention through planning and drafting to revision. (v)

Again, the concept revolves around involving the student in the processes of reading, writing, and thinking critically. Since the basic writer must deal with the same academic community which the more experienced writer must deal with, it seems appropriate that the basic writing course develop those crucial skills. Such interpretive skills can only be fostered in a classroom which accepts the idea of the basic writer as an active, complex learner.

Instructors who incorporate experiences and assignments from advanced writing courses into the basic writing curriculum provide their basic writers with an opportunity to succeed in academia. Basic writers become aware, early on, of the development in their own writing process, and they become aware that abstract and critical thought is the

foundation of good writing. They are better able to identify and complete the "leap" that Shaughnessy discusses from concrete to abstract statements and to develop connections between, and within, ideas. In addition, the basic writer will become aware of the all-inclusive and recursive characteristics of writing.

Appendix A  
The Trophy Syndrome

by

Robert Samuelson

The school board of Fairfax County, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, D.C., had a problem: complaints from high-school students and principals that class rankings were unfair. On a grade scale of 0-4, a majority of students had averages of 3.0 (B) or better. Yet, because "ranking" means that students are listed in order from best to worst, depending on their academic performance, half of the students were naturally ranked in the lower half of the class, despite their grades. The solution: eliminate rankings.

My son Michael, six, plays in a soccer league. The highlight of the fall and spring seasons is the same: the trophies. Every team gets trophies. Everyone on every team gets trophies. It doesn't matter how well you play or even whether you play. Just show up for the last game, when trophies are distributed. (I can't write "awarded.") Michael has four.

"Kids shy away from demanding courses or demanding teachers, because it will affect class rank," says principal Joseph Arangio of Langley High School. A student in a neighboring county told the Washington Post: "I know people who sat down and cried when they got their rank. They said, 'I worked so hard, and this is what I have to show for it....' People flip over these things."

Up to a point, all this rings true. But perhaps you suspect (as I do) that things have gotten out of hand. Competition can be nasty, but it's often useful. "No pain, no gain" is usually true. Edison wrote: "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration." The tendency to tell everyone that everything is OK--everyone gets a trophy--may temporarily lower stress, but it relaxes the pressure to do our best, which may be better than we thought we could do.

People suppress bad news. By now, it is well known that U.S. students score poorly in many international comparisons but rate themselves near the top. Doubtlessly, the executives who mismanaged General Motors convinced



themselves that they were doing fine. This sort of socially acceptable self-deceit is designed to spare hurt feelings and puff up our self esteem. But it is harmful when the truth ultimately intrudes, as it usually does. It did at GM. Schools can end rankings and give everyone A's. But they can't create more openings at elite colleges to which their students aspire. Students who expect to get in won't. Handling disappointment--and going on from it--is one of life's lessons. It is taught by experience, not denial. Too much self-satisfaction tempts us to treat disappointment as somebody else's fault. Because we're OK, blame for our misfortunes must lie elsewhere.

Everyone likes praise. At the age of six, an extra pat on the back is helpful. A few trophies are no big deal. Our problem is that we perpetuate childish customs. Praise given too easily or too lavishly is worse than none. Trophies are worth something only if they are earned, not bestowed.

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